

From: Jerry C. Barnette
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To: Mr. Harold Weisberg
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Dear Sir:

I'm afraid this may seem a rather strange plea for help. I am a high school History teacher, and an unwilling student of the events of November 22, 1963. I have been and still am frustrated by the bland, misleading way in which these and other events are portrayed in the history Texts we are forced to deal with. I do my best to present as much of the intricacies and mysteries of the event as I can under the constraints of time and curriculum, but one issue refuses to resolve itself. If I reject either of the two "official" versions of the assassination (Warren Commission and House Committee), with what will I replace them? There is such a bewildering diversity among Commission critics and authors, and the evidence itself is such an epistemological hall of mirrors that I am daunted.

I am writing to you, because, for some reason, you seem accessible. The voice I hear speaking in your books seems more personal and human than others. I have written to you before to obtain (I think) almost all of your works, and realize that I am writing to a person, not a publishing conglomerate. This is not perhaps how it should be. Nonetheless, you were among the first groundbreakers and when I read other critics, I always hear echoes of your early work. So it is to you that I pose this question, realizing you may have no time to respond: How does a responsible educator deal with the avalanche of material concerning the assassinations of the 1960's?

If nothing else, could you please send me a list of your works. There may be some I do not have among the 7 titles I now own, and I'd like to add them to my collection. For whatever time and consideration you can spare me, I thank you. If you can do nothing to help me now, I still thank you for your example of courage and determination, to which I often point as I teach my unit on this subject.

Sincerely,


Jerry C. Barnette

In a single mail I received similar inquiries from three educators. To a degree their questions are the same or similar. Where some may not have expressed interests expressed by others, my response may possibly be of interest or value. In addition, I am now 77, have had a series of illnesses during the past decade and a half, and am limited further by recovery from open-heart surgery. So, I hope you will understand why I use this means of response.

For context I begin with a general observation. The political assassinations were never really investigated officially. While I have done little work on the assassination of Robert Kennedy, I am certain that the statement that there never was any official intent to really investigate it either is true. One can conjecture about the reasons but the fact is without reasonable question. On the JFK and King investigations I've obtained about a third of a million pages of once-withheld records and I base my statement of fact on records disclosed to me in the series of FOIA lawsuits by means of which I obtained those records.

The lack of any real official investigations means that those interested in these crimes have no real leads for private investigations. While this is less true in the King assassination, those leads do not provide a basis for determining who did kill him. I am without doubt that Ray did not.

The records I obtained have always been available to anyone who cares to come here and go over them. Their volume, obviously, is in itself a barrier to meaningful access, without an enormous investment of time. As a practical matter, where people have been able to focus their interests, they have been able to make use of these records. In recent years I've been able to get students from local Hood College to make the searches and copy what writers, TV people and others in the media have wanted. All I have will in time be a public archive at Hood College.

Most of the literature is of conspiracy theorizing - whodunits. Two conspicuous and excellent exceptions are Sylvia Meagher's Accessories After the Fact and Howard Roffman's Presumed Guilty, but both have been out of ~~print~~ print for many years and not many of either were printed. So, few are available second-hand.

What this means is that there are few books that can be used as texts in what I regard as responsible teaching. I do not regard whodunit texts as responsible. I think that to a large degree they have confused and misled people, particularly the most persuasive of them. Taking Lifton's Best Evidence as an illustration, aside from common sense, is there any basis the average person has for questioning his theory, really theories? No matter how well-informed or well-read, almost nobody has a basis. Yet his theory is untenable if you know the facts. I mean this to apply to it at each of the alleged steps. His VCR, I understand, is currently the best-selling "documentary."

My own approach has not been to try to solve the crime(s), attractive as that would be. I have made a study of how the basic institutions of our society worked in those times of great stress and since then. The result is that my work could be and in fact was accurate. I know of no error at all in my first book, which was completed in February, 1965, and I know of no significant errors and very few minor ones in the six that followed. With the exception of two errors I picked up from the press, the few others are from accurate use of official records. In this I am saying that I have not misled or misinformed anyone.

My first book is based entirely on the published Warren Commission documents. In the second book I began to use what I could see at the National Archives. As I obtained records that had been withheld I made more and more use of them. I also did some investigating, more in the King case, where as Ray's investigator I did the investigation that

led to the evidentiary hearing, to ^{decide} ~~decide~~ whether or not he ^{should} ~~had~~ be granted a trial, and for the two weeks of that hearing.

Based on my initial contacts with the House Select Committee on Assassinations I had nothing to do with it thereafter because I was convinced that it did not intend any real investigations and was instead going to try to validate the official mythologies. My contacts were with the staff, not the "members. If you have their published volumes you can see for yourself that each hearing began with a narration of what certain critics had said, followed by the official effort to debunk. I am the one exception. I was not mentioned in any narration and I do not recall any reference to my published work. Where I have checked HSCA's work, as I did for John Ray, it was grossly and deliberately inaccurate and often entirely false. Aside from other defects in it. I had only a few days to prepare the rebuttal statement published in its Volume 9, and the HSCA did all it could to frustrate my access to the records it promised to provide and to a large degree did not provide. I finally had to begin writing without having most of the necessary records. I had to use a dictating machine and my wife was transcribing my dictation while I was dictating. We finished the early morning of the day it had to be handed in. To this day I've not read it, but I've had not a single complaint about the accuracy of its content. I know of no other effort to rebut or refute any of its work. I cite this as a means of your independent assessment and evaluation of its work.

One of you said he wrote me because I am an individual and not a publishing conglomerate, suggesting this is "not perhaps as it should be." You'd have trouble getting any responsiveness from any ~~conglomerate~~ conglomerate, from my experiences. One or two of you mentioned John H. Davis' Mafia "ingfish, so I illustrate with that, intending this also to give you an understanding of the deliberate dishonesties that taint much of the more popular works.

Davis asked for help. I told him he is welcome to anything I have, including copies, but that doing the work for him was impossible for me. I offered to get a student for him. He liked the idea, the college provided an intelligent and hard-working senior, and ~~she~~ she spent ~~all~~ all her free time for much of a year searching and copying what he wanted. I did not look at what she copied and do not know what she did copy. She had free and unsupervised access. When Davis' book came out he identified the late Jack Wasserman as "the top mafia lawyer" and said that he had rummaged through my records for much of a year. In fact Wasserman was not a mafia lawyer at all. He was one of the most respected immigration lawyers. He asked nothing of my. We never laid eyes on each other. Not only was he never here, he never sent anyone, either. While Davis' deliberate lies were not technically libel, there were defamatory. It took considerable effort, many many efforts, to get this defamatory removed from the paperback.

There is no factual support for his crap about Marcello's involvement in the JFK assassination and where he has used these records they are not accurate and have no support at all.

In this I'm also trying to indicate to you the problems conscientious teachers have in using texts they have no means of evaluating. Taking Scheim's rubbish as a different example, and for you who did not mention his book, he also alleges a mafia job, you do have a means of making an independent assessment: what does he say about the assassination itself - other than assuming the official mythology. Not a thing! The assassination is essential irrelevant in his theory. He made it all up.

I can't do this with all the books, but because he has the credentials of a college professor, I tell you how you can evaluate Michael Kurtz's ego trip. He is so ignorant of the basic fact he actually wrote that the TSVD front steps were lower than the JFK limousine. Where he has factual content he took it from the works he lambastes.

"How does a responsible educator deal with the ^{avalanches} ~~avalanches~~ of material concerning the assassinations of the 1960s" one of you asks. I think the only way is the way I have, in a study of how the basic institutions of our society worked.

One of you asks if there is a network of people interested in studying and learning the truth. Not really. Years ago there were more but in almost all instances they were conspiracy theorists and most have abandoned their interest. A few of the better ones, like the magnificent Sylvia Meagher, are dead. Bud Fensterwald has established the Assassinations Archives and Research Center. It goes to much trouble and effort to be of help and to the degree it can it provides information in various forms. It is at 918 F St., NW, Suite 510, Washington, D.C. 20004. It lends books and cassettes. It collects all it can of what I regard as the nut theories, too.

It is difficult, as one of you says, to know what to read. I can give only this general guide without going into enormous detail that really should not take time for.

Joesten's work is a waste of time. He was pretty sick in the head by the time he stated his newsletter and his mimeographed printings. Marrs', and I'm responding to specific inquiries, is worse than a waste of time. It is a compendium of the nut theories and he lacks information on the basic and established facts. Gandolfo's, in the usual sense, is not a book. He xeroxed some of his correspondence and a transcript of the House Rules Committee relating to HSCA. I can't recognize from what he says in his On the Trial of the Assassins what Garrison and I were both involved in. What he wrote is fiction. I am not familiar with Sutton's The Order but I'm confident that they had no connection, as some theorize, with the JFK assassination.

I know nothing about "JFK: The Mystery Unraveled," by the Laroucheniks but I am certain they've made no factual inquiry and that this is more of the political theorizing they present as fact.

Farewell America is a fake by the French SDECE. I met "Lamarre" and exposed the film he'd prepared based on the fictitious book. Believe me, no matter how appealing it may be, the book is a complete fabrication. Here again there is some basis for an evaluation: what does he say about the crime itself? It has been so long I've forgotten, but I think it is all on one page.

I like Fletcher Prouty and believe his work where he was involved and has knowledge is solid, as when he writes about the NSAMs. But that does not accredit what he thinks or theorizes about the assassination. "....just as it was Bundy, not JFK, who called off the crucial air strike at the Bay of Pigs." I think this is not the way it was. That "crucial" strike had not been agreed to and as I recall had not been planned so there was nothing to call off. Moreover, at the last minute and very reluctantly, JFK agreed to a strike by the Navy's planes. Only the Navy went by the wrong time.

I am not familiar with the Jakob and Lilli Segal "theory of the origin of AIDS (made at Fort Detrick in 1979 pursuant to a contract originating — and documented in House ~~xxx~~ hearing on DOD Appropriations June 9, 1979)?" I am not familiar with their work and regret that I do not read German so I might read it. I've heard a similar rumor but not of any proof.

I've not been involved in any network and don't subscribe to any of the newsletters because what exists is all essentially conspiracy theorizing and I say ~~above~~ above what I think of that.

What is not asked I volunteer for those who teach the political assassinations. There are a few professors who do not theorize. Of those I know those doing it longest are Dr. David Wrone, Univ. Wisconsin, Stevens Point, 54481 and Dr. Gerald McKnight, at local Hood College. I know that McKnight has a detailed ~~xxx~~ outline from which he teaches. I think he or they would send copies of the syllabus if you ask for it.

I hope I've responded adequately to what I was asked and apologize if I've wasted time for any of you who did not ask what I addressed.

Best wishes, Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg